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ABSTRACT

This report describes the current situation of the Basbakanlik Arsiv (the archives of the Turkish Prime Minister's Office) and presents a series of recommendations for the improvement of the facilities, services, and staff of the archives. The legislative framework within which the archives operate, the holdings of the archives, the classification of archives collections, physical and storage facilities at the archives, reprographic services offered through the archives, public access to archival materials, and the training of archives staff are among the topics reviewed. Specific recommendations are made for each of the areas addressed in the report. (JL)

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T U R K E Y

# DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION OF THE BASBAKANLIK ARSIV

by Ivan Borsa

Report prepared for the Government of Turkey by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco)

U N E S C O

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## I - INTRODUCTION

1. At the request of the Government of the Republic of Turkey the Director-General of Unesco arranged, under the Organization's Participation Programme for 1979-80, for a consultant to visit the country from 1 to 14 April 1980. The consultant's terms of reference were to :

"To study the present situation of the National Archives in Istanbul, giving particular attention to the legislation now in force and the structure, functions and activities of the various services".

2. The scope of the mission was limited to the institution in Istanbul known as the Başbakanlik Arşivi (BA), the English translation of which is "Archives of the Prime Minister's Office". The title reflects the fact that the BA comes under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office in Ankara. The BA is the national repository for most of the surviving archives of the former Ottoman Empire. It operates independently of the National Archives of the Republic in Ankara, although it is envisaged that ultimately the BA may be transferred to the latter. The consultant did not visit Ankara and was, therefore, unable to discuss the current situation and future of the BA with the Prime Minister's Office and with the National Archives of the Republic. He was also unable to visit other government agencies such as the Foreign Office, Ministry of Education, Land Survey Office and the institution known as Vakfiye Arşivi (Archives of Pious Foundations), all of which hold some records of the Ottoman administration.

3. During his fortnight in Istanbul the consultant received the closest collaboration from the Acting Director General of the BA (Mr. Atillā Çetin) and his colleagues.

## II - PRESENT SITUATION OF THE BAŞBAKANLIK ARŞIVI

### General comments

4. The situation of the BA remains in essence the same as that described in the report of the Unesco technical assistance mission which visited Turkey and made some recommendations in 1968. * During the twelve years that have elapsed since then little progress has been made in regulating by law the functioning of the BA and in making provision for the professional training of its staff.

5. During the past seven years the BA has had five Directors General (either substantive or acting). The previous Director General (Professor Nejat Göyünc) was appointed in 1979 and relinquished the post on 1 January 1980. Since the programme which he initiated has come to a halt the recommendations made in this report may be of assistance in developing a new programme.

6. The BA is a long way from its parent ministry, the Prime Minister's Office in Ankara. The latter discharges a multiplicity of important functions and has a heavy workload. Understandably the BA appears to be regarded as a peripheral department; and its sense of isolation is increased by a feeling that it is left to solve its own problems with inadequate support and budgetary resources.

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* Report not published.

7. Staff who work in the BA belong to General Service categories of the Civil Service and, it was said, are paid about 50% less than staff who work in universities. This has an adverse effect on the morale of professional staff who feel that the special skills which they must acquire in Ottoman palaeography and diplomatic and in reading Arabic script are neither recognized nor properly remunerated. A further grievance is the lack of facilities for up-to-date training in archival management.

Archival legislation

8. The Unesco technical assistance mission which visited Turkey in 1968 (see para. 4) recommended as an urgent and essential measure the promulgation of an archives law. In 1974 a draft law was submitted to the Turkish Parliament but it has yet to be debated. The BA continues therefore to operate in a vacuum without adequate statutory authority and there seems little prospect for the time being of remedying this omission. In present circumstances the climate is hardly propitious for the introduction of modernizing measures which have budgetary and, perhaps, political implications.

9. In the absence of a modern legislative framework within which it can operate the BA continues to follow precedents and traditional procedures many of which were introduced more than thirty years ago when circumstances were different and facilities very limited. Some of these procedures, notably those governing access and supply of microfilms (see paras. 26-30 below), are now anachronistic and unduly restrictive.

The archival holdings of the Başbakanlik Arşivi

10. The holdings of the BA comprise with some exceptions the surviving records of the central administration of the Ottoman Empire including those of the Imperial Divan (Divān-i Hümāyūn) and of the Grand Vizier's Office (Bāb-i Ālī). Since the Ottoman Empire once embraced territories which have since become 20 successor states, its archives are an indispensable source for the history of the latter and their continuing preservation and availability for scholarly research are matters of international concern. Because of its international clientèle the BA should be regarded as a major national asset and its potential fully exploited.

11. When Atatürk moved the capital of the Republic from Istanbul to Ankara, several government departments (e.g. Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health etc.) left their records of the Ottoman period in Istanbul in the custody of what is today the BA. Some agencies, such as the Ministry of Education and the Land Survey Office (Tapu ve Kalastro), moved their older records to Ankara. The Foreign Office has kept its records of the Ottoman period partly in Istanbul and partly in Ankara. Other institutions, such as the Museum of the Topkapi Palace (Topkapi Sarayi Müzesi) and the religious court of the Müfti in Istanbul, also hold records of some central agencies of the Ottoman administration

12. Because of the situation outlined above the BA holds only a part of the records of some former Ottoman departments, a significant number of which are in the custody of other institutions such as the Museum of the Topkapi Palace and the Ministry of Pious Foundations (Vakiflar Genel Müdürlugu). The BA has no authority to seek to gather into its custody the records of all central agencies of the Ottoman administration: its role is limited to accepting such material as is offered to it. Examples of the latter are the

records of the Yildiz Palace (the personal archives of the Sultan Abdülhamid II) and the records of the Quarantine Office. These were transferred to the BA because their former custodians considered that the BA could provide better facilities for preservation and access.

13. The total holdings of the BA are estimated to be in the region of 10,000 linear metres. The documents are in Ottoman Turkish and written in Arabic script: a few are in foreign languages. Reference has already been made (see para. 7) to the need for professional staff to be conversant with the obsolete Ottoman Turkish administrative language and skilled in the palaeography and diplomatic of that period.

14. The majority of the records originating before A.D. 1839 were received in a chaotic state and until 1957 were handled in the BA without respect for their provenance. In consequence the contents of some 300-500 records groups, subgroups or series were mixed and became disordered. A fortunate exception was the records of the Yildiz Palace, which were received in their original order: in spite of misguided attempts to dismember this order the documents remain today for the most part in their proper archival sequence.

Arrangement classification and description

15. To sort and arrange the masses of disordered documents, as a first step, volumes, mostly entry books and registers (Defātir), were separated from single documents (Evrāk) and volumes from different series when then arranged as described below. It may be stated in passing that there is no objection in principle to continuing the practice of separating volumes from individual documents so long as the rule of respecting provenance is observed.

16. Instead of the records being arranged according to accepted principles of archival classification, they were in the years between the two world wars subjected to an artificial arrangement, selected documents being arbitrarily taken from the disordered mass and grouped in 16 special collections (tasnif) formed on a subject basis or according to the reigns of particular sultans. Within each tasnif the documents were arranged either chronologically or in no particular order, numbered serially and briefly described. The hand lists thus made were bound and are available in the searchroom of the BA. No indexes were compiled and the quality of the lists is very variable.

17. Subsequently many documents of a date earlier than A.D. 1839 (A.H. 1255) were arranged chronologically by years without any regard for provenance. The post-1839 (the year of the reorganisation of the Ottoman Empire) records remain in a confused state. It is a matter for hopeful speculation whether the contents of the majority of the bundles, boxes, sacks, etc. will be found to be from the same source.

18. In 1956 the BA began the massive task of arranging the pre-1839 records according to the principle of provenance and classifying them in 300-500 record groups, sub-groups or series, within which the documents were arranged chronologically by year, month and day. In the 24 years that have elapsed since then some five million individual documents out of a total of perhaps 15 million (this number may be an overestimate ) have been dealt with in the manner described.

19. Today three sections, amounting to 11 staff in all, are engaged on this work, but the records which have been arranged and classified are not yet available to users. This is because the numbering, make-up (in folders)

and boxing of the documents has not been completed and/or listing remains to be undertaken.

20. Four sections are working on the post-1839 records. They are being sorted and classified in record groups which reflect the agencies which created them. The original departmental registers of the Grand Vizier's Office for the period A.D. 1839-1891 are preserved in the BA: it is therefore possible to reconstruct the original order of the records and this task should be completed in two years. Completion of the archival arrangement of post-1839 material will occupy between five and seven staff 10 years.

21. Unfortunately the departmental registers of three ministries viz. Public Works, Pious Foundations and Privy Purse, are not available. Only parts of the holdings of these ministries are being classified and the documents arranged in chronological order within series. The final step is to list each document. This laborious and time-consuming task could be effectively shortened if instead of attempting to list each single item, individual documents were grouped on a subject, case or other basis and the units thus formed were summarily described. There are in the BA between two and three million disordered documents of the Ministry of Pious Foundation. The section dealing with this mass of material comprises one solitary individual. Considering that the average annual output of a BA archivist is about 7,000 documents, it is obvious that more staff are needed (see para. 50) to cope with the immense work load.

Review of post-A.D. 1839 holdings

22. To date the BA has not given any thought to the feasibility of reviewing its post-A.D. 1839 holdings with a view to identifying and eliminating material which does not merit permanent preservation. It is unquestioned that surviving pre-1839 records should be preserved in toto, but, once the accumulations of post-1839 records of the central Ottoman administration have been sorted, consideration should be given to the possibility of weeding out material of ephemeral value.

Buildings and storage

23. The BA is housed in eight buildings: six are in the old gardens of the Sublime Porte and the remaining two in another part of the city not far away. Most of the buildings were not originally built as archival repositories. One of the six buildings (or depots, as they are called) in the gardens is the administrative headquarters of the BA containing offices, a searchroom and workshops for technical services. The other five serve as repositories. The two depots outside the gardens were originally built as colleges (medrese) attached to the Mosque of Sultan Ahmed (the Blue Mosque) and to the Süleymaniye Mosque. Conditions of storage in the depots, particularly in parts which are underground, do not meet acceptable modern standards. None has heating or air conditioning, and in the two or three depots which have dehumidifiers the equipment is not functioning because of a power shortage.

24. Equipment is old fashioned and cumbersome, consisting of assorted chests, some of possible historical interest, wooden shelving and (mostly in the refurbished Süleymaniye depot) steel shelving of the Dexion type. The documents are packed and stored in various ways. Boxes and board folders with straps of a kind used in many other countries, are used for newly arranged records. Other records are packed in bundles secured only with string or in old and small wooden boxes. In the depot near the Blue Mosque a lot of documents are piled in heaps or kept in big wooden boxes. Only a minority of the documents e.g. those of the Yildize Palace, is kept in their original order.

Several hundred maps are stored in roll form in Depot No. 5. On the ground floor of Depot No. 2 records of the Foreign Ministry are serviced by staff from that ministry.

25. Office accommodation for staff in the headquarters building is inadequate. Only the reprographic workshop, formerly a garage, has sufficient space for additional large equipment and staff.

Public access

26. Only those documents which have been definitively arranged in accordance with their original order, as indicated in contemporary registers, are those which have been listed by the BA are available to users in the searchroom. Thus, at most, 10-15% of the holdings are open to access. All documents later in date that A.D. 1914 remain closed.

27. Permission for access is given by the Prime Minister's Office in Ankara, and foreigners, who account for 10% of users, have to make application through their embassies. This procedure involves a minimum delay of 15 days for Turkish nationals and 60 days for foreign researchers. The permits issued are of variable duration.

28. The researcher identifies and selects documents relevant to his research with the help of the searchroom lists and/or of the registers which are kept in the repository. Full assistance is given by BA staff. The quality of the lists varies a good deal, but researchers familiar with their subject can generally make use of them.

29. An average of 20 people a day use the searchroom of the BA. The number of documents which a researcher may see in a day is limited to 10, a quota which is felt to be unreasonably restrictive bearing in mind the imprecision of the lists. For example, a searcher who having consulted the list selects 10 items may well discover when the documents are produced that some are irrelevant. Moreover, documents applied for are not produced until the following day.

30. There are also restrictions in obtaining copies of documents. A foreigner is normally permitted to have copies (microfilm or Xerox-type) of up to a maximum of 100 pages, provided that, in the case of volumes, the number of pages copied does not exceed 50% of the volume. A Turkish national can order up to 200 copies. These limitations are, however, sometimes waived to facilitate documentary publication. For official purposes types copies are made by the BA in modern Turkish of documents written in Arabic script. It should, perhaps, be added that it is not the BA but the Prime Minister's Office which decides the number of copies allowed: this has always been the practice although (cf. para. 9) it is not based on any formal regulations.

Reprographic service

31. This service is relatively well equipped. Its equipment comprises:

- Microfilm camera: Dokumator IV/GDR (for perforated film only)
- Film printer: Carl Zeiss Jena
- 3 Microfilm readers: Dokumator (Zeiss old type)
- Sheet film processor: Durst Laborator 184
- Microfilm processing by a manually-operated system

- Canon 5000: for Xerox-type copies
- Savin Copygraph 215 office copier: presented by an institution in the German Federal Republic before the Canon 5000 machine was acquired

32. Copies are made on the equipment described above for both reference and administrative purposes, but the organization of this work could be improved and more effective use made of the equipment available. Last year 5,000 negative microfilm exposures were made: the number of Xerox-type copies produced is not known. Roll microfilm is not manufactured in Turkey and its import has been temporarily suspended. As a consequence microfilming operations have come to a halt.

33. In 1979 the BA put in hand an interesting microfilm project. In the interest of conservation of the original documents and to facilitate access, a start was made in copying on the Canon 5000 machine the 263 volumes which comprise the important class of records known as Mühimme Defteri (Registers of Important Matters). To date nearly half of the volumes have been copied and the copies bound so as to constitute facsimile registers.

34. The microfilm holdings of the BA are stored in the laboratory. The reels of film need proper arrangement and a means of identification.

Documentary repair and binding

35. Techniques used in documentary repair fall short of accepted modern conservation practice, and the two ladies engaged in this work have received no proper training. The method of repair used is to paste the defective document between two sheets of tissue paper, but this is done without preliminary cleaning, disinfection and deacidification. Annual output is of the order of 500-600 sheets per person.

36. To bindery has standard equipment and the work undertaken consists of conventional binding of volumes (e.g. of the Mühimme Defteri referred to above), make-up of boxes etc.

Publications

37. To date the BA has not had a planned publications programme. Over the years members of the staff have on their own initiative produced guides, articles etc. which have either been published officially or by a commercial publisher. Thus the last guide of the BA, executed by Mr. Çetin, was published commercially in 1979. Professor Goyunc, Director General in 1979, had plans for The Journal of Ottoman Studies to be issued as a BA publication, with a financial subvention from other countries such as Libya and Bahrein; but, after his dismissal, the Journal was in 1980 published independently.

Staff

38. In relation to its holdings (10,000 linear metres of documents) BA's staff complement of 81 is not ungenerous. Of this number all but four (three graduates and one other engaged on temporary contract terms) are permanent employees: 25 staff are university graduates, 24 have received a high school or secondary education and the remaining 32 have only had a primary school education.

39. Although there are six directing posts, only the acting Director General (Mr. Çetin) exercises real management responsibility. The post of Director General is unfilled, one Assistant to the Director General and two departmental heads have been in ill health for a long time, and one departmental head was dismissed in 1979. The staff is organized in 10-15 sections or working units, but shortcomings in organization and management militate against efficient and productive use of resources.

The problem of training

40. The lack of proper facilities for professional training is a problem which the BA is not alone in encountering. Reference has already been made (para. 7) to the need for BA staff to be skilled in Ottoman palaeography and diplomatic, and in the Arabic script. Although there are a few faculties (Departments of History or Literature) in Turkish universities which have the capacity to provide a basic introduction to these subjects, practical experience of them and of the obsolete administrative language of the Ottoman period can only be acquired within the BA.

41. Although the BA sometimes arranges on a rather haphazard basis short refresher courses, there is no organized provision for training in the archival sciences. In this connection staff are seriously handicapped by a lack of knowledge of foreign languages: this makes it difficult for them to educate themselves by studying international archival literature or through instructional visits to other countries.

42. The consultant did not have an opportunity of visiting Ankara to discuss the training of archivists with the Language and History-Geography Faculty (Dil ve Tarih Cografya Fakültesi) of the University of Ankara and with the Social Sciences Faculty (Idarive Sosyal Bilimler Fakültese) of the Hacettepe University. He did, however, have a worthwhile discussion with Mrs. Meral Alpay, an associate professor (doçent) at the University of Istanbul, who is responsible for extension training of librarians who wish to acquire experience in the archival field. To promote such training she has been in touch with Loughborough University in the United Kingdom and with Austrian authorities in Vienna. The latter have promised to send a specialist to Istanbul to give a week's lectures. In May Mrs. Alpay is to visit the Federal Republic of Germany with the object of establishing contact with persons who can help with professional advice on archival literature and training. It was suggested by the consultant that she should approach Dr. Eckart Franz and the Archives School at Marburg.

44. Mrs. Alpay contemplates inviting a professor of archival sciences to visit Turkey for two semesters. The latter would institute a basic training course for archivists and give lectures, since there is nobody in the country competent to give such instruction. An English or a German expert is preferred because these two languages can be translated by Mrs. Alpay and her assistant. If this plan materializes it would clearly be sensible, as Mrs. Alpay intends, for the younger archivists of the BA to attend the lectures as well as the librarian students.

International relations

44. Participation of Turkish archivists in international activities has generally been on a small scale, and the BA has no bilateral agreements for cooperation with other countries. Between 1960 and 1967 the Director General (Mr. Işiközlü attended the International Congress and Round Table Conferences of the International Council on Archives (ICA); in 1977 and 1978 the Director General (Mr. Gürkan) attended two meetings of the International

Centre for Sources of Balkan History (CIBAL) held at Plovdiv and Nice. A senior member of the staff (Mr. Işiksal), who retired in 1976, was an active corresponding member of the Microfilm Committee of the ICA; and in 1967 Mr. Çetin and Mrs. Aren participated in the Stage Technique organised by the Archives Nationales in Paris.

45. The limited international contacts referred to above now seem to have ceased entirely. Because of the economic situation it is questionable whether the BA will be represented at the forthcoming International Congress of the ICA to be held in London in September 1980.

## III - RECOMMENDATIONS

### Aims and priorities

46. The recommendations made in the following paragraphs should be regarded as a long-term plan for the next 10-15 years. It is hoped that they will assist the BA in the task of modernising its organisational structure and working methods; and that the user-orientated policy suggested will win many friends for the BA at home and abroad. Priority should be given to those recommendations concerned with arrangement and description (para. 49-51), with easing restrictions on access (para. 54-57), and with education and training (para. 66-69).

### The competence of the BA

47. Pending the enactment of archival legislation the competence of the BA should be regulated by decree or otherwise.

48. The BA should be authorised to begin collecting by purchase, gift and deposit private papers of the Ottoman period which have historical value.

### Arrangement, classification and description

49. A concerted effort should be made to speed up the arrangement, classification and listing of the disordered accumulations of records inherited by the BA.

50. For pre-A.D. 1839 (A.H. 1255) holdings the following specific action should be taken:

(a) where in a class or series of records more than one document bears the same date, each document should for reference purposes be given an individual number.

(b) documents within a given year should so far as possible be described in lists only by date and reference number.

(c) as work progresses the documents should be opened to inspection in the searchroom.

(d) the arrangement of material for the period A.D. 1789-1839 (A.H. 1207-1255) should be accelerated by transferring staff from other less essential duties to this work (see para. 51(c) below).

51. For post-A.D. 1839 (A.H. 1255) holdings the following action should be taken:-

(a) Priority should be given to completing the reconstruction of the records of the Grand Vizier's Office for the period A.D. 1839-1891 and to opening them to inspection.

(b) The disordered accumulations of records in the Sultan Ahmed Depot should be sorted and arranged in accordance with their archival provenance. The original order should so far as possible be reconstructed; if this proves impossible series and case or subject files should be developed on an empirical basis. Volumes should be distinguished from loose papers. General descriptions of the records, i.e. of classes and series, should have priority over listing individual files etc. (cf. para. 21)

(c) Existing procedures for processing and listing the records of the ministries of Public Works, Pious Foundations and the Privy Purse (Hazine-i Hassa) should be stopped. Instead the treatment described in (b) above should be accorded to them.

(d) The existing special collections (tasnif) should not be dismembered until the tasks mentioned above have been completed.

(e) The possibility of weeding post-1839 records should be studied.

Improvements in repository storage

52. Old wooden shelving and chests which have no historical value should be replaced by modern steel shelving, as has already been done in the Süleymaniye depot. At the same time consideration should be given to the possibility of increasing storage capacity, for example by installing shelving in the arcades and galleries at the Sultan Ahmed depot.

53. Packing and boxing of records definitively arranged should proceed continuously. An effort should be made to maintain a proper record of the number of linear metres of shelving occupied by individual record groups and classes.

Easing restrictions on use

54. The Director General should be given delegated authority to grant access to bona fide researchers.

55. At present all records later than 1914 are closed. This date should be advanced and the closure period shortened to conform with generally accepted international practice.

56. The limit of 10 documents a day per user for searchroom productions should be revised.

57. The restrictions on the number of copies which can be ordered, viz. 200 for Turkish nationals and 100 for foreigners and only 50% of the contents of a volume, should be abolished.

Modernisation and exploitation of the reprographic service

58. Once the import of stock microfilm is resumed the concept of planned microfilm projects should be adopted, thereby giving the two operators an opportunity to exploit their equipment to the maximum.

59. Suitable microfilm publication projects (e.g. of the Mühimme Defteri) should be formulated. Revenue from the sale of microfilm would produce much needed foreign currency.

60. The equipping of the microfilm laboratory should be completed by the acquisition of an automatic processor and a densitometer.

61. A system should be devised for the storage of reels of archival negative microfilm and an appropriate finding aid provided.

62. The capacity of the Canon 5000 copier should be fully exploited to produce a minimum of 50,000 copies a year.

Documentary repair

63. The existing practice of repairing documents without prior cleaning, disinfection and deacidification should be stopped.

64. Technical advice on up to date equipment and methods of documentary restoration should be sought from the Süleymaniye Library. BA should also cooperate with the University Library when the latter's new conservation service becomes operational.

Organisation and management structure

65. The future Director General should make a thorough analysis of the functions and objectives of the BA and institute an organizational structure in keeping with current needs and modern concepts of management. It is of particular importance that real delegated powers of management should be given to Assistants to the Director General and heads of departments.

Education and training

66. Arrangements should be made for the future Director General and one or two senior colleagues to undertake instructional visits to countries in Europe in order to broaden their experience of modern methods of archival management.

67. Staff should be encouraged to learn foreign languages, such as English, French and German, so that they can read foreign professional literature and keep up with international archival practice and technology.

68. Training courses should be held regularly to enable young archivists to acquire greater proficiency in palaeography and diplomatic, in the Arabic script, and in the obsolete Ottoman Turkish administrative language.

69. Staff of the BA should participate in the courses in archival science which Mrs. Alpay hopes to organise at the University of Istanbul.

International relations

70. The BA should develop bilateral links with archive institutions in other countries and, on a multilateral level, should participate in the activities of the International Council on Archives, of the Arab Regional Branch of the ICA (ARBICA) and of bodies such as CIBAL.